National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Technical Preservation Services
National Center for Cultural Resources

ITS
NUMBER **17**

Interpreting
The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

Subject: Adding Parking to the Interior of Historic Buildings

Applicable Standards:
1. Compatible Use
2. Retention of Historic Character

Issue: The rehabilitation of historic buildings in crowded downtown districts often creates the need for extensive new parking. City governments may have strict requirements for the number of cars a project must accommodate, a need never anticipated when most historic buildings were constructed. This forces property owners to investigate alternatives for meeting these demands, including adding parking to the interior of buildings. Although inserting parking into a historic building is generally not a recommended treatment, in some instances, parking may be introduced in a manner that meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Parking inside historic buildings must not require extensive new openings on significant facades, and must provide adequate ventilation without disturbing the appearance of the existing fenestration. Mechanical ventilation is generally preferable to removing louvers or windows. The parked cars must also be screened from public view.
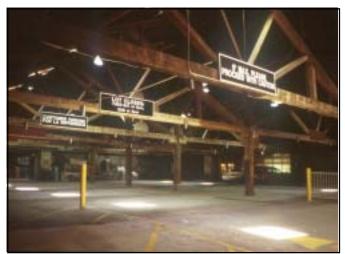

This brick warehouse complex built between 1865 and 1905 was converted to commerical and retail uses. A concealed rear structure worked well for interior parking.

Application 1 *(Compatible treatment)***:**
When this late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century brick warehouse complex was converted to office and retail use, the local jurisdiction required the owner to provide a large amount of parking. Although the space designated for parking was not originally intended for this purpose, its utilitarian character lent itself well for this function and its warehouse quality, complete with its heavy-timber trusses, was left exposed. The entrance to the parking area was located along an alley, where existing openings were combined for vehicular use.
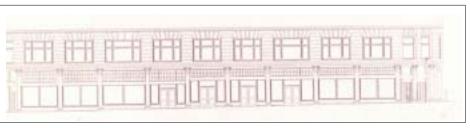

The new parking entrance is appropriately located along an alley where two smaller openings were enlarged to accommodate vehicular traffic.

The historic heavy-timber trusses were left exposed in the parking area.

Application 2 *(Compatible treatment)*:
This early-twentieth century commercial structure in a major downtown area was converted into retail and residential use. Parking was introduced at the rear of the first floor, which had little historic fabric remaining, and in the basement, which was service-oriented in nature. The new parking entrances were added to secondary facades and were not visible from the primary elevations.

The transom of this compatible replacement storefront contains both spandrel glass and screening. The screened portion is used for ventilation.

In this example, it was difficult to ventilate to the roof, so other alternatives were investigated. The solution was to direct the exhaust out through and above the retail space. A modest transom detail was developed as part of the new compatible replacement storefront, which alternated spandrel glass with a dark screening material. This screening provided the necessary ventilation, without being too visually intrusive.

The parking area in this early-twentieth century structure is not visible to the public.

Detail of transom (under construction).

Application 3 *(Incompatible treatment)*: Parking cars is never appropriate in historically finished interiors, as demonstrated by the following example:

Parking cars in this highly-finished space is not a compatible treatment.

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